

~ 1 Peter 1:1-2 ~

Week two, May 2, 2021

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Sermon Notes

—recap of last week—

Peter wrote this letter to Christians living in a non-Christian society facing serious hardships. He reminded them that this life is not a vacation; it's an arduous journey. We must stand firm as God makes us more like him. Stand firm. Be holy.

—an apostle of Christ—

v. 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ..."

Peter introduces himself as an apostle. He has been commissioned by Christ to speak on his behalf. Thus, this letter bears authority, for Jesus is speaking through Peter (i.e., "Holy Scripture").

Notice it is Peter 'the apostle,' not Peter 'the denier, or 'the fickle,' or 'the temperamental.' The Lord had been at work in the fisherman's life!

Remember Jesus had said to Peter: "on this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). Jesus had been fulfilling this promise in Peter and, in part, through this letter.

—elect exiles—

v. 1. To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...

The near universal way New Testament writers address their recipients is as “Saints.” But Peter calls them “elect exiles.” Why?

Sometimes leaders use names to call upon a sense of identity as a motivating force. (E.g., a coach saying “You’re a Tar Heel!” or a parent saying “You’re a Smith!”) These are identity markers calling someone back to who she is.

There is great danger in not knowing who you are. Social rejection and cultural ridicule create identity crises. People must have a stable sense of who they are. Peter is reminding us that we are elect exiles.

Three observations from this introduction. Christian identity...

- (1) ...is God’s decision, not our choice.
- (2) ...is a calling forth unto becoming.
- (3) ...will put us at odds with all that is false.

—God’s decision, not our choice—

“Elect” means to be chosen or called forth. There are some important examples in the Old Testament. Abraham is elect (chosen) by God. Israel as a nation is chosen by God and called forth to be his people. (See Deut. 7:6-8.) King David is another prominent example. (See Ps. 89:3.)

We do not become elect by our own merit. It is solely sourced in God’s love and freedom. (See Deut. 7:7.)

And now Peter’s recipients, though not Israelites, are being told they’re chosen too. What problems do we face when we find our identities outside God’s choice?

- (a) Problem #1: Paralyzed by choice.

Modern westerners are obsessed with choice. Our lives revolve around the idea of having free choices. And the idea that anyone would get in the way is offensive.

At a certain point, however, our freedom runs afoul and becomes paralyzing. (See studies by Barry Schwartz of Swarthmore College—he concluded that kids draw better pictures when their color choices are limited.)

(b) Problem #2: Our self-deception.

We deceive ourselves when we say we can choose our identity. Our identity must be grounded in something firmer than our own fickle selves. (Consider the student needing a teacher's affirmation, or a child longing for her parents' love.) Stable identities require affirmation from communities, wise leaders, etc.

Thus, in calling his recipients the elect, Peter turns the modern notion of identity on its head. Who you are is a matter of God's decision, not your choice.

We see these truths all throughout the biblical story. God created us in his image. When we wandered away in sin, God came to redeem us—the maker claiming back that which was always his.

Creatures will never know who they are until they hear their identities spoken by the voice of their maker.

—calling forth unto becoming—

We are not perfect when God chooses us. When God elects someone, he calls them to come out (e.g., Abraham, Israel, the twelve disciples). God claims us and calls us into a sojourn.

- v. 2. ...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.

(a) according to the foreknowledge of God.

God chose you before the foundations of the earth had been made. Your story as God's elect is far older and deeper than even your story and family here on earth.

(b) in the sanctification of the Spirit.

God the Father makes the decision to make you elect. The Spirit works on your heart and conscience. He causes you to feel unsettled, softening your heart. Your eyes are opened to the good news and you turn to Jesus day by day.

(c) for sprinkling with his blood.

The Son, through his life and death, provides the sacrifice that makes you clean and reconciles you to the Father.

God's project of choosing and forming us is something that began before all time and involves the triune God. The Spirit carries this process along (sanctification.)

In this process of becoming, you'll like some things and hate other things about yourself. You'll mess up a lot. (Abraham nearly made shipwreck of his calling. But his identity was not grounded in his performance, but in God's decision. Phil. 1:6.)

—at odds with all that is false—

To be an "exile" is to be alien, a sojourner, and stranger. It is someone who is not at home in their current location.

The reality of the exile has a rich biblical history. Consider again Abraham, Israel, and David, who were all sojourners. Joseph, Moses, and Daniel were all strangers in foreign lands.

Every child of God is separated from the world by grace, never at home in a world that's rebelling against God. Election leads to exile. If God's calling you to be at home with him, then the rest of the world will feel out of sorts.

The reality of exile runs *through* us. When God claims us, he turns the light-switch on. We both love and lament more deeply the people and creation around us. We see its worth, potential, and brokenness more clearly. We see the shadow of death as we anticipate the resurrected life. To be an exile is gloriously hard.

—conclusion and application—

- (1) Remember that God forms us in the wilderness (i.e., Israel). When facing trials, know that God is refining you.
- (2) Focus less on the world's identity markers. It's natural to be caught up in world. But the biblical story pulls us out and places us in the church where the roots go deeper.
- (3) Remember: you're a work in progress. The Spirit is at work. Rest in this truth instead of recreating yourself.
- (4) Rest most deeply not in the question 'Who am I?' but 'Whose am I?' Identity comes down to the person you've given your heart to.

—closing prayer—

Lord, thank you for this declaration that we are elect, we are exiles because of this election, and we wouldn't have it any other way, and I pray that this would give us stability and courage in the days ahead. Amen.

Discussion Questions

Was there something in this sermon that stood out to you?

Consider the ways Jesus worked in Peter's life, that Peter would even become a faithful apostle. What does this say about God? What can we trust him to do?

Reflect on your life for a bit. What identities have you created for yourself in the past? Did you feel fickle and insecure in them? Does being God's chosen bring peace and stability to your mind and heart in questions of identity and purpose? If not, why maybe?

Choose one example of someone chosen by God to be an elect exile (Abraham, David, Joseph, Daniel, Jesus, the disciples, etc.) Read or recall their story. How did God choose them and pull them out of the world's identity markers? How did God make good on his promises to them and prove himself trustworthy?

Which of the world's identity markers tempt you? Pray boldly that the Spirit would work in these weaknesses.

As elect exiles, God opens up our eyes to see things more clearly, both the beautiful and the broken. Think about how you've experienced this 'clear seeing' in both respects.

How might being an elect exile go hand in hand with humility and lowliness in the Christian life?

Look back at the four points of application. Choose one to pay particular attention to this week. Think of ways to think about and live in this truth this week.

When Time Allows

Here is a helpful video about the biblical concept of ["exile,"](#) and then another one about ["the way of exile."](#) Both by the Bible Project. Great for all ages.

[Here are Barry Schwartz's findings](#) from his experiments on free choice and its paralyzing effects. "As the number of choices grows further, the negatives escalate until, ultimately, choice no longer liberates, but debilitates."

See [chapter 5](#) ("The Flag of the World") of *Orthodoxy* by G. K. Chesterton for some quick, clear thoughts on Christian exile and what it means for us.